Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: Sacramento Public Library, Sacramento Room
Title: Rusty Gagnon Collection
Identifier/Call Number: MC 91
Physical Description: .3 Linear Feet 1 folder and 1 artifact in 1 archival box
Date: 1973
Abstract: Included are the personal reminiscences of then-Sacramento County Sheriff's Department dispatcher Rusty Gagnon of the April 28, 1973, railyard explosion in Roseville, California. Also included is a single piece of shrapnel from one of the more than 7,000 250-pound Mark-81 bombs that detonated at the railyard.
Biographical / Historical
On the morning of April 28, 1973, a munitions car – just dispatched from the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot in Hawthorne, Nevada – exploded at Roseville, California's Southern Pacific railyard. It was one of 18 total munitions cars, each holding 330 Mark-81 bombs. Buildings five-miles away suffered broken windows and the blast could be heard as far as 40-miles away. When the series of explosions stopped, 160 freight cars had been demolished with another 140 damaged. No official cause was determined, but one theory points to the condition of the boxcar itself which may have been the victim of overheated brake shoes that ignited its underside. Although no fatalities were reported, roughly 200 people required medical care while between 3,000 and 5,000 area residents had to be evacuated. In addition, 10 homes were destroyed, 400 sustained major damage and 650 had broken windows.
Gagnon began her 22-year career in California's law enforcement/justice system in 1972 as a Sacramento Sheriff Department dispatcher where she also served as a Reserve Deputy. During her career she held positions as a Sacramento County Welfare Fraud investigator, a Crime Prevention District Administrator specializing in Child Abuse Intervention/Prevention in the California Attorney General's office, and several positions in the California Department of Corrections from which she retired as a Parole Agent II Specialist in 2004. Gagnon received her B.A. in Criminal Justice in 1972 and an M.A. in 1975 – both at Sacramento State University. In May 1998, the Criminal Justice Alumni Chapter at Sacramento State recognized her significant professional accomplishments and her efforts in bringing about opportunities for females in the field of Criminal Justice. Gagnon is the mother of a son, Philip, and daughter, Michelle, and grandmother to 3 granddaughters and 2 grandsons. She is also author – under the pen name of Rusty Fairbanks – of the police procedural novel, "Lost in the Maze", scheduled for publication in September 2020. She currently lives in NW Washington state.
Scope and Contents
The collection includes a personal narrative of Gagnon's experiences during the April 28, 1973 explosion. Entitled "Thar She Blows," the manuscript is 11-pages in length, double-spaced in Times Roman font. A 4-inch by 12-inch chunk of shrapnel from an exploded Mark-81 bomb is wrapped in padded archival material.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Rusty Gagnon Collection, MC 91, Sacramento Room, Sacramento Public Library, Sacramento, California.